

Whitehead (P) A
General Epistle

TO BE

Read amongst Friends in all their
MEETINGS.

Dearly beloved Friends, Brethren and Sisters;

I Being a Prisoner for the Word of God and Testimony of Christ Jesus, having not any other way to manifest that *Care & Love* which is in my heart for you & to you, its come upon me to write this *Epistle*, to stir you up, by way of Remembrance, to call to mind the days that past, wherein the Lord in great Mercy did visit us, when we walked as other *Gentiles* in the vanity of our Minds, which being alienated from the Life of God, we had not Ability to overcome those Lusts, whereby we were inticed into Evil, to the wounding of our own Souls, and darkening of our own Understandings, until it pleased the Lord to visit us with the springing forth of the blessed Day of the Son of Righteousness, whose holy Light shined in our Hearts and Consciences, which discovered unto us our lost Estate and undone Condition, whilst we lived without God in the World, in which Light the quickening Power of Christ Jesus was manifest in our selves, which brought us to an inward sense of

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our own weakness and corruption, under which we were truly bowed down, and broken in the Righteous Judgments of God, which brought great Humility and Tenderness of Heart and Conscience in us, through the appearance of his Grace, by which we were exercised in his holy Law, which he writ in our hearts, and put his fear in our inward parts; whereby we departed from Evil, and received ability to do good, through the Obedience of the Spirit of Christ Jesus, who washed and sanctified us with his precious Blood, that we might be fitted for his use and service, after he had so mercifully visited, illuminated and accepted us. 'Oh! the Love which God shed abroad in our hearts, when he had enlarged us to run the way of his Precepts, is more than can be expressed, which Love constrained us to seek his Glory, and the good of his scattered People, with the hazard of our Lives, Liberties, and whatever else was near and dear unto us in this World, we gave it all up through that Love which was the bond of our Friendship with God, and one with another, wherein also we were edified, and became an Habitation of God, whose Tabernacle is with us. And however he hath suffered us to be smitten with the Rod of men, Loving-kindness and Mercy he hath not taken from us, though our Exercises have been many, and the Perils and Tribulations which we have gone through, have been of divers kinds, and those with *false Brethren* none of the least; for no sooner did we begin to appear in that Testimony which we had received from God, but we had many Adversaries, besides the Imitators that from amongst our selves did arise, uttering perverse things, which gave occasion to Professors and People, who bent their Tongues like Bows against us, in *Reproach, cruel Mocking, Reviling, Slanders,*



Slanders, Stoning and Buffeting; all which the meek Spirit and Life of Christ Jesus manifested in us, did shine through and overcome, even as the Wind bloweth where it listeth, and disperfeth Fogs and Mists of Darknefs that arife out of the Earth, infomuch that the Priests, who were Ringleaders in those things, were fain to call to the Magistrates for help, who employed their Power to crush us, by *Imprisonment, Whipping*, and other wrongful Vexations, as *Finings, Spoiling* us of our *Goods*, and the like: And when that Generation of professing Priests saw they prevailed nothing, they struck hands with the *Church of England*, which they had exploded, to suppress us. Yet through all these things Truth hath prevailed, and God hath glorified his own Name, in which he gathered us, and hath blessed and prospered us into a People. And now let the *Watch-men* of the *Church of England* beware lest they strike hands with the *Papists*, to help to root us from being a Posterity in the Earth, lest they also be swallowed up of their Helpers; for again God will glorifie his own Name, and preserve his People in the sight of his Enemies, that he may be admired in them that fear him, and trust in his Name.

And now, being sensible how that Generation which did see the Wonders of the Lord, and were upheld by his mighty Power, is passing away, and many of them gone before us to their Everlasting Inheritance with Christ Jesus in his Kingdom, and another Generation that have heard more, but seen and experienced less, both of the Wiles of Satan, and operation of God's Power, that discovers and breaks his Snares, are entering, who are the Off-spring of the Elders, who through Faith and Patience have obtained a good Report, besides many others who have come into the Vineyard at other hours
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of the day, who must all betryed and proved, as virtuous men have been in all Ages, that have obtained like-precious Faith. And my hearts Desire and Prayer unto God, is, that we all may be found unto the Praise and Glory of God, who hath called us out of Darknes, into his marvellous Light, that every one may be counted worthy of Eternal Life, and be made up amongst the Lords Jewels, and gathered into his Treasure. And for this cause bear with me in a Word of *Exhortation, Warning and Advice*, which in the Love of God I send amongst you, from the movings of the Spirit of Christ Jesus, that quickens us and knits us together, as Members of his Body, in which we both suffer and rejoyce one with another, having a sence and feeling of one anothers Conditions.

And *first*, I write unto you *Fathers and Antients* amongst the Flock and Family of God, who have known the Lords great work in the beginning, and the manner of his carrying it on, both in your selves and others; blessed are you of the Lord who keep your Habitation in him, and do humbly walk with him, daily enduring the Crofs of Christ Jesus, and Contradictions of Sinners against your selves, knowing that the Servant is not greater than his Lord; and that we only can be preserved, increafe and grow, as Trees that bear good Fruit, and wither not, by the same Principle of Life, which first quickened us unto God; and therein let us abide for evermore, and be exercised towards God in all your Assemblies, wherein the Oversight and Care of the Flock of God comes upon you, who mark the end of our Conversation. And therefore that we may be kept holy and blameless in the Love of God, and in the Meekness, Pa-
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tience and Humility of Christ Jesus, to be good Examples to them that follow after us, is the earnest desire and travail of my Soul.

And you that are *Young Men* in the flower of your Strength, because the Word of God abides in you, whereby you have in a good measure overcome the Wicked One: Oh! my *dear Brethren*, watch and be sober, modest and lowly minded, fearing the Lord always, lest ye be again entangled with any Yoke of Bondage, or Pollutions of the World, which ye have escaped through the Power of Christ Jesus, and also lest ye be insnared by the Wicked One, whom you have many times overcome; *for by Faith we stand*, not bearing the Root, but the Root bears us, whom it behoves to keep on our *Armour of Light*, in which walking, we have our *Feet shod with the Preparation of the Gospel of Peace*, and the *Helmet of Salvation*, and the *Breast-plate of Righteousness*, the *Shield of Faith and Sword of the Spirit*, which is the *Word of God*, by which we are enlightned to see the devices of Satan, and his Wiles and Temptations, whose deadly Malice is against us, and therefore seeks to devour us, or bring us into danger, either by inward Temptations or outward Violence, which he stirs up in this time of our Tryal and Adversity, making use of those for Instruments, that have dealt treacherously in the Land of Uprightness: And therefore let us be circumspect in Word and Conversation, committing our Way unto the Lord, *that weigheth the Mountains in Scales, and the Spirits of men as in a Ballance, who with the Breath of his Mouth will scatter the Chaff, and disperse the Clouds of Darkness, which would obscure the Glory of Gods heavenly Appearance*, as he hath done in Ages past, and likewise in our days, as many of you are Witnesses.

So having this Hope, we faint not, but believe the God of Peace will tread Satan under our Feet, and through Christ's Power (without whom we can do nothing) we shall triumph over the wicked One; and as the *Love, Goodness and Mercy* of the Lord ye have obtained, let the same freely run through you, that by *Patience, Meekness, Long-suffering* and seasoned Doctrine ye may gather in the scattered, and those which have halted through feebleness of mind, by your diligent labour in your Monethly and Quarterly-Meetings, and elsewhere, may have stumbling Blocks removed out of their way, and be confirmed, and all the upright in Heart preserved in the Unity of the Spirit and Bonds of Peace; and let Love abound in your Hearts one to another, according to that old Commandment that Christ gave his Disciples, for in that you may edifie one another; *But the Wrath of man works not the Righteousness of God.*

And you Children who have known the *Father*, through the Light of his beloved Son Christ Jesus, who hath shined in your Hearts, in whom you have believed, that ye might receive Remission of Sins, for his Names sake, take diligent heed unto your selves, lest you grieve the Spirit of God, through which you have received the Adoption, and are sealed unto the day of Redemption: But watch, and be sober-minded, lest the Adversary, that presents himself amongst the Sons of God, when he comes from walking to and fro in the Earth, get advantage against you, and draw your minds out from the pure holy Seed, whereby you are begotten into the love of God, from which fervent Breathings and holy Desires and Godly Zeal springs up in broken, tender and humble Hearts, which thereby draws in daily nourishment, that keeps you growing, fresh and fruitful, whilst

whilst you abide in a Holy Reverence, and are devoutly given up to walk in the true Light & Life of Jesus Christ, who is both our Saviour and Preserver, without whom we can do nothing well-pleasing unto God. And therefore little Children that abide in him grow more fresh lively and fruitful, than aspiring Spirits, or lofty Branches that run out till they have lost their hold in the Root, which should nourish them; Oh! how soon do they become like Corn on the House top, decay and wither, when their Expectations are frustrate, their Faith fails by which they should stand, and their Desires grow weak and feeble, their Love and Zeal cold; for where Humility is wanting, there is not a capacity of receiving more Grace: for such who are lifted up, are wise in their own Eyes, and conceited that they lack nothing, but abound in their own sense, and are full of Words, and have not a place in them to receive that Virtue which the Lord is ready and willing to communicate.

Therefore, *dear Children*, be not High-minded, but wait upon God in Silence, Humility and pure Fear, that of his fulness you may receive Grace sufficient for you in all your Exercises, and a Spring of holy understanding, to deliver you from the Snares of Death; for the Lord hath a regard unto you that fear him, and think upon his Name in these trying dayes, wherein *The Proud are counted happy, and those that work Wickedness are lifted up.* Therefore look not out, nor be dismayed at what Man can do unto you, whose Breath is in his Nostrils, (for wherein is he to be accounted of?) but be faithful and valiant in keeping your Meetings to wait upon God, and worship and serve him that made Heaven and Earth, who knows how to glorifie his own Name, and reward all his faithful Servants and Prophets, and them that fear his Name, small and great. So when you see the

Wicked flourish like a green Bay-Tree, and live in Wealth and Pleasure, Prosperity and Dominion, let not your Hearts be troubled, though with Rigour they rule over you, and oppress you on every side; for the Most High beholds it, and hath an Eye open to the cry of the Poor, and will deliver his Children out of the Jaws of the Devourers, and give them a more sure Reward and everlasting Inheritance in the sight of their Enemies, who thought their Life Bitter, and their End without Honour; but the Righteous enter into everlasting Life, and the Wicked go into everlasting Punishment, and the Gulf is fixed that they cannot change their Minds nor their State, for their Torment endures forever; but the meek and patient Sufferers and faithful Followers of Christ Jesus shall enter into their Masters Joy, which is unspeakable and full of Glory.

And you that are *Convinced*, and have a Profession of Truth from the knowledge of things comprehended in the Understanding, from what you have heard and read, and the advantages you have had by your Education, it lies upon me to Exhort and Warn you to wait to possess the true Christian Life, and take heed of resting satisfied with that which you have taken to your selves, *For it is the gift of God that is Eternal Life*, which is to be waited for in the Cross: And also, take heed that you confide not in your Ability to do any thing of your selves, for that will be rejected, till you know and inwardly feel the Seed of God, and his work in your Hearts; and this is the Word of God, *That you believe in the Light of Christ Jesus, and be planted into his Death, that dying together with him, his Life may be made manifest in your mortal Bodies, that both your Souls and Bodies may be capable of glorifying God, in bringing forth the Fruits of his Spirit, wherein he can delight; for now is*
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the Ax laid to the Root of the Tree, and every Tree that bringeth not forth good Fruits, must be hewn down and cast into the Fire: But the long-Suffering and Patience of God leadeth to Repentance, and hath been great towards many of you, who have stood in a convinced state, but have been negligent and careless, not walking worthy of the Mercy of this day, wherein the Lord hath not been awanting to you, but hath visited you time after time, looking that you should bring forth good Fruit; and through the Intercession that hath been made for you, he hath let you alone Year after Year, and his Servants have laboured amongst you in the Lords Vineyard, that ye might be Fruitful whilst the Rain hath descended upon you: But Oh! how many are yet barren, or like that Ground that doth not bring forth Herbs meet for the Dresser, but Bryars and Thorns, and other unfavoury Weeds, which the Lord takes no Pleasure in; and therefore I am sensible that Wrath is kindled against that Ground, and those unnatural Branches that bring forth evil Fruits, who sit and speak against their *Brethren*, and slander their *Mothers Children*, who because of his Long-suffering have thought the Lord delayed his coming; and therefore have joyned with his Enemies, and smitten their fellow-Servants, labouring as much as in them lies to expose them and all their faithful Testimonies to the scorn and fury of this prophane and desperate Age, for which cause a Day of Tryal is come, and the Lord will manifest whom he hath chosen to feed his Lambs and watch over his Flock, and they shall come near unto him, and have the Light of his Countenance, and in all their Troubles be comforted with the presence of the Lord, whilst his Indignation smoketh against all that are treacherous and false-hearted, who have not regard-
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ed the Glory of the Lord, nor sought the Prosperity of *Sion* in what they have brought forth, but have seen false Burthens, and causes of Banishment, to cause the unwary to stumble, and turn the simple from the right way, and their Reward shall be according to their works.

Therefore all *dear Friends*, keep your Habitation in the Light, and be Followers of that which is good, that in you may arise and encrease the first Love and Faith by which you believed the Record that God gave of his Son, in the Unity of whose Life and Light we were blessed and prospered into a People, and the Lord hath delight in us, and will preserve us as a Nursery of tender Plants, from which shall spring a mighty People, though the Nations are Angry, and may seek to hinder the Work of the Lord, who will distress them, as in Antient time, that they may be tryed that dwell upon the Earth. Wherefore, all tender hearted Friends, take heed of looking out, but abide in the Light, where there is no occasion of stumbling; for it judges down all evil Thoughts, and surmizing one of another, which gender to Strife, and tends to break the Bonds of Love and Friendship one to another, which are, and of right ought to be kept inviolable amongst the Disciples of Christ, that being the great Commandment he hath given to them, and the principal Mark he hath set upon them through all Generations.

Therefore, *dear Brethren and Friends*, love the Lord withal your Hearts, for that is a perfect Bond to keep you in Obedience to him, and love one another as your own Souls, that you may sympathize one with another in Afflictions, and help, comfort and support one another, as the Lord hath helped and comforted you, that it may be manifested by your Works, that you have obtained like-precious Faith with the holy Antients, who
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said not to those that were destitute and afflicted, *Be thou warmed and filled*, but did minister unto them of the Ability that God had given them, that by works of *Charity* and *Mercy* their Faith might shine forth, having *Vir- tue* added unto it, which makes the true Faith to differ from the Opinions and Made-Faiths, which will all fail and come to an end; but the *True Faith*, which stands in Gods Power shall have the Victory, and those that possess it overcome the World: Even so, *Amen*.

L O D God Everlasting, keep all thy tender People in the Unity of the Faith that works by Love, that we may be kept near unto thee, and one to another, that thy Delight may be in us, and thy Presence with us, now that our Adversaries rage and roze against us, & seek to lay waste thy Heritage, and would shut the Mouthes of them, that praise thee. Wherefore arise, O Lord, and scatter thine Enemies, that wickedness may come to an End, and Deliverance to thy People, so shall the expectation of bloody and deceitful men be frustrate, and their Mouthes shut that blaspheme thy Name, whilst thou art pleased to let thy Glory shine in thy holy Tabernacle, which thou hast pitched amongst us, upon which Glory let there be a Defence for evermore, that those which have trusted in thee may not be confounded, but renew their strength in thy Power, to the end of Days and Time, that in Eternity thou maist be magnified over all for ever.

From Lincoln-Castle, this 21st }
of the 10th Moneth, 1682. }

John Whitehead.

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